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## SELF-CULTIVATION OF CHARACTER

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RECENTLY I happened to meet on a suburban train out of Chicago an old college friend who is now a successful banker. Naturally our conversation turned to old times. Said he, "It was one of the decisive moments of my life when Miss Brown, in the little old academy at O———, decided to pass me in Latin, despite my confession that I had 'ponied' my way through the class. Upon this credit hung the fate of my graduation, and if I had lost it, I should never have entered college, for my parents had scrimped and saved and sacrificed my much-needed help on the farm until that failure would have been the last straw. Probably the whole trend of my life would have been different."

"The whole trend of my life!" What a weight of responsibility he placed upon the shoulders of a teacher! And yet how many of just such cases we dispose of within a year with rough and unsympathetic hands! Like the wise man of old, we need to breathe a prayer of pure humility: "And I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. . . . Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad."

But, after all, our work is not so much to judge between the good and bad in the child as it is to help him to decide between good and evil for himself. For I am convinced that lapses from the standards of honesty on the part of students are due not so much to violations of moral standards as to a lack of such standards. Reviewing my own student days, I can

recall, with unpleasant vividness, a small red German dictionary which I carried in the pocket of a skirt of the same hue and which I did not scruple to use when I felt at a loss for a word in test or examination. We disliked the German teacher, and the members of "our crowd" considered it legitimate to use any means to annoy or get the best of her. Curiously enough, I have no recollection of ever resorting to dishonesty in Latin or mathematics. These were easy subjects for me, the teacher commanded my respect, and I felt no temptation here. But I think I was a freshman in college before I developed much of a sense of honor in these matters.

In a certain well-known text in the teaching of English the author writes: "The more we study the adolescent period, the more we appreciate the delicacy of its influence—its sensitiveness to evil and its sensitiveness to good." It is this sensitiveness which may become the basis of a higher idealism resulting in a higher conduct. I find that boys and girls respond very quickly to any appeal to their sense of honor, and that their failure to live up to a high moral standard is largely due to the fact that they have never formulated and expressed their ideas of morality and honor. I am supplying, in the paragraphs that follow, some concrete instances of the methods I have used in securing this response.

#### SOME IDEALS GAINED FROM THE READING OF "SILAS MARNER"

##### *The Initial Assignment.*

Recently Madge, a high-school girl, in writing an autobiography related some of the tomboyish pranks which she had shared with her brother, and then concluded her paper in a rather plaintive way by saying that since she had heard Miss Rodney's talks to the girls in group meetings, her greatest ambition was to be a lady. I think Madge may have been thinking of some of the external things that go to make a superficial idea of a lady. I do not know.

At any rate, I wish you to read Chapter 11 of *Silas Marner*, giving special attention to the descrip-

tion of Nancy Lammeter. See if you can find any statement that would be helpful to Madge in carrying out her ambitions to be a lady. Having found such a statement, be sure that you understand all the words George Eliot uses in it.

### *Class Discussion.*

1. What statement have you found that would be helpful to Madge in making herself a lady?

(Most of the students will be ready to respond with "Nancy had the essential attributes of a lady—high veracity, delicate honor in her dealings, deference to others, and refined personal habits.")

2. How do the essential attributes of a gentleman differ from those that George Eliot names for a lady?

3. What is a more common word for veracity?

4. In what different ways might a student be tempted to be untruthful? Excuses? Failure to prepare assignments?

5. What do you think is the chief cause of untruthfulness? Fear? Desire for gain?

6. Do you respect a student who gains his ends by falsehoods?

7. What is self-respect?

8. Could you have self-respect without veracity?

9. What do we call the inner voice which tells us whether a thing is right or wrong? Is it always right? Does it ever cease to speak?

10. What is the danger of telling "white lies"?

### *The Second Assignment.*

Write a theme following out some suggestions gleaned from your study of *Silas Marner* or the class discussion. For example:

1. Relate an incident in which you told the truth at the risk of punishment or great embarrassment. Make the situation clear, emphasize your feelings and your struggle against temptation, and



make plain what finally determined you to tell the truth. Give your reaction after it was all over.

2. Relate an incident in which you failed to tell the truth and have been secretly ashamed of your failure ever since. Show the situation, make clear your struggle against temptation, and emphasize your shame upon finally yielding.

3. Relate an incident in which you deliberately failed to tell the truth and were not sorry afterwards. Make the situation clear and explain carefully your reasons for acting as you did. (The problems raised by this set of themes could be discussed by the students.)

### *Class Discussion.*

Having given some attention to the first essential attribute of a lady or gentleman as outlined in George Eliot's description of Nancy, let us see what we know of the second—"delicate honor."

1. What does the word "honor" bring to your mind?

Here various nuances in the meaning of the word honor may be brought out: The honor that is integrity or chastity—the honor of an upright man or a virtuous woman; the honor that is reputation or solid fame—the honor of a military leader or a great civil servant of the people; the honor of a people who fight when a less sensitive nation would avoid a conflict.<sup>1</sup>

2. Which meaning of honor do you think George Eliot had in mind?

3. Is there any difference between honor and veracity? Which is the more comprehensive term?

4. Name some common situations in school in which students sometimes forget that their honor is involved.

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<sup>1</sup>Suggested by a discussion in M. Bezard's classroom, as set forth in the English translation of his book, *My Class in Composition*.

5. What does the schoolboy's code of honor have to say about lending or borrowing written work to be copied? About writing or forging excuses? About bluffing? About telling on a fellow student? About cheating in examinations? About asking unnecessary questions to kill time?

6. How can one cultivate a keener sense of honor?

(The other attributes of a lady which George Eliot mentions as essential I have purposely omitted here for the sake of brevity. Similar assignments may be worked out for them.)

Up to this point the assignments have been for pupils of the tenth grade. The following assignments are for the eleventh grade.

### VOCABULARY

#### *Assignment.*

Just as in demonstrating a problem in geometry we must be able to use the various terms which name lines and angles, so in trying to think clearly on the subject of morals and conduct we must be familiar with a certain ethical vocabulary.

Study the meaning of the following words and be able to distinguish between those which are sometimes confused:

ethics  
character  
reputation  
honor  
morality  
veracity

honesty  
integrity  
principle  
nobleness  
conscience  
uprightness

In order to test your understanding of these words, insert in the blanks the words which you think most suitable:

1. The sum total of a man's mental and moral qualities makes up his \_\_\_\_\_.

2. A man's \_\_\_\_\_ is at stake when he is tempted to take a bribe.

3. A man's \_\_\_\_\_ is what he is supposed to be; it may not correspond with his \_\_\_\_\_.
4. If a man does not obey his \_\_\_\_\_, it ceases to function.
5. If a man has kept his moral standard intact, he is a man of \_\_\_\_\_.
6. A man who lives a life of immorality, is said to be without \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Honesty, uprightness, and high thinking go to make up \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Freedom from deceit or fraud is commonly called \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Have you a definite standard of \_\_\_\_\_?
10. Have you ever formulated a system of moral principles or \_\_\_\_\_, to be used or followed in your school life?

#### SELF-EXAMINATION

##### *An Assignment.*

A boy in one of my classes, a junior in high school, recently made the remark that the business world has no place for the old proverb, "Honesty is the best policy." He said it seriously, with a ring of conviction in his voice.

A young man of my acquaintance, who is manager of the thrift bureau in one of Chicago's largest banks, told me that in working out one of his projects for the bureau, he naturally supposed that he should act in accordance with the principles of honesty and justice. But he was informed by the vice-president and another officer of the firm that ethics had no place in business, and that if he continued in such a course, he would be in danger of losing his place. The young man, however, carried out his own ideas, and still retains his position, while his critics are no longer with the bank.

(At this point, one would get a better response by telling something of one's own small lapses from honesty, which have been corrected as a sense



of honor has been aroused. For the sake of brevity, I omit them here.)

Write a theme in which you consider the following questions:

1. Are you and your associates doing things which you look upon as slight matters, but which are, in reality, dishonest? Give specific examples.

2. Do you think that high school has lowered or raised your standard of honesty? Give examples.

In answering these questions, deal with such matters as examinations, preparation of assignments, excuses for absence, tardiness, failure to prepare assignments.

Be *honest* in writing this paper. It will be treated confidentially. Call it *My Standard of Honesty* or *Am I a Person of Integrity?*

WHAT "A TALE OF TWO CITIES" MAY DO FOR US.  
*Class Discussion.*

To me the greatest tragedy of *A Tale of Two Cities* lies, not in the misery and bloodshed of the French Revolution, nor in the long undeserved imprisonment of Dr. Manette, nor even in the supreme sacrifice of Sydney Carton, but in the picture painted in the following passage:

"Waste forces within him, and a desert all around, this man stood still on his way across a silent terrace, and saw for a moment, lying in the wilderness before him, a mirage of honourable ambition, self-denial, and preservation. . . . A moment, and it was gone. . . . Sadly, sadly the sun rose; it rose upon no sadder sight than the man of good abilities and good emotions, incapable of their directed exercise, incapable of his own help and his own happiness, sensible of the blight upon him, and resigning himself to let it eat him away."

By his great sacrifice Sydney Carton atones for his whole dissipated past, and we are profoundly touched by the basic nobility of his character. It is not likely that any such opportunity for self-

sacrifice will be given us. Let us see, then, whether there is any form of self-denial that we can practice. Sydney Carton seemed to have two selves, the self which appeared in the courtroom and at Stryver's, and the self which he saw in the mirage as he went home one night. Which of these selves was the stronger? Suppose he had said to the lower self, "I am going to overcome you for the sake of my higher self," and had persisted in this overcoming, would this not have been a form of self-sacrifice as great as the other? With his brilliant mind he might have become a man of great power and usefulness.

Each of us has a higher and a lower self which seem to be at war with each other. When we wish to attain some end, we find the habits of ease and of carelessness which we have allowed ourselves to form, arguing for themselves. They say, "Why not put off for tomorrow what you should do today?" Thus always promising ourselves to do something tomorrow, we let the days and weeks and months slip by and see the vision of our earlier years still unfulfilled. Then what is the lesson of Sydney Carton for us?

### *Assignment.*

1. Think of some man in your neighborhood whose position seems to you enviable, one of those men who are commonly called "lucky". Ask him about his start in life, and write it down for me. Confine your account to his early years. Analyze his characteristics to see how much of self-denial and of effort there has been in his life. Was it luck or merit that has placed him where he is?

2. Constant effort means constant self-denial. Most of us exert effort only spasmodically; the rest of the time we aimlessly follow the path of least resistance. This means that we are indulging the self which would forever keep us from advancing. Let us practice making an effort, if it be ever so



little. We can begin right here in our English work. Let each ask himself, "In what particular phase of English am I most lax? In grammar? In punctuation? In spelling? In handwriting?" Then let him set about it to correct this laxness by real *effort*.

Write a theme in which you discuss one of the following.<sup>1</sup>

- a. My Greatest Failing in English Composition.
- b. My Principal Mistakes in Grammar—Inaccuracy, Repetition, Carelessness, Incoherence.
- c. Punctuation—As the Spirt Moves Me; As Logic Requires.

The response to these lessons may not be so very evident on the surface, but I find that students return to tell me of the helpfulness after several months—even years—have elapsed. One very tall, slender chap who had literally slept through his sophomore year in English was aroused through the idea of self-denial to make vigorous efforts to save himself. While keeping up a truly remarkable daily record (that is, for him), he managed to purchase, with money he had earned, a dictionary costing ten dollars, a handbook of composition not required in the course, and a book dealing with the subject upon which he was writing his term paper. He sometimes carried his dictionary, huge though it was, to school, out of sheer pride and joy in its ownership. The other boys always referred to it as "Gunnar's vest-pocket edition."

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## ECHOES FROM THE MARCH MEETING

ON Friday and Saturday, March 11 and 12, the twenty-seventh annual meeting of the Association was held in Cambridge and Boston.

*The Harvard Conference.* At the Friday conference, held in conjunction with the Harvard Teachers' Association, Dr. Walter F. Dearborn, Professor of Education at Harvard Uni-

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<sup>1</sup>Suggested by Bezar's *My Class in Composition*.

versity, was the first speaker. His topic was *The General Meaning of Tests: A Few Experimental Reading Tests*.

In suggesting a cause for the prevailing "testing epidemic", Dr. Dearborn called attention to the wide variation in teachers' judgments as to what should indicate a pupil's intelligence. Naturally, teachers vary in their methods of rating intelligence—some giving great emphasis to neatness, others to accuracy, others to interpretation. With the use of standard tests, this variation in judgment is largely avoided.

We must be warned, however, of the danger of too much drill, too much emphasis on speed and accuracy, too much attention to memory, and, consequently, too frequent neglect of the processes of thinking. Using as illustration a test in silent reading, Dr. Dearborn's explanation of its purpose and its results showed definitely that it is a test of speed rather than of quality of performance. Hence, its limitations must be recognized. While the standard test does accomplish some things well, it cannot accomplish all things—especially in English.

Professor H. R. Steeves, of Columbia University, discussed *The Columbia Research Bureau English Test*. The speaker explained that the test has a two-fold aim: to determine a candidate's fitness for college; and, if he is properly qualified, to further determine which courses he may most profitably pursue. The measurement is made under four heads: spelling, mechanics of writing, vocabulary, reading knowledge.

The student's ability to spell is tested by forty words selected from seven hundred fifty words most frequently misspelled. His command of the mechanics of writing is measured by his skill in detecting seventy errors in a short prose passage. The vocabulary test offers him an opportunity to use his powers of discrimination. It consists of one hundred words for each of which there are four possible meanings given. The candidate underlines the one which, in his opinion, is nearest in meaning to the test word. The reading-knowledge test determines the student's ability to identify quotations from, or facts about, literature. In the scoring, the four elements of the test are weighted in the following manner: spelling, 40; mechanics, 60; vocabulary, 100; reading knowledge, 100.

Professor Steeves was followed by Ernest R. Caverly of North Adams, who gave an interesting discussion of *Tests in Grammar—Their Use and Abuse*.

A feature of the conference was the display of tests prepared through the courtesy of the World Book Company, Ginn and Company, and the Harvard University Press.

At the dinner held at the Harvard Union, Dean Holmes of the Graduate School of Education spoke a brief word of welcome, Mr. Edward Davison read from his own poems, and Lady Adams delighted us with a chatty paper on her literary experiences in England. Sir John Adams closed the meeting with an uncanonical "benediction".

*The Business Meeting.* At the business meeting on the 12th, the election of officers for 1927-28 took place, with these results:

*Officers*

President: Claude M. Fuess, Andover Academy,  
Andover, Mass.

Vice-President: Charles Gott, Tufts College.

Editor: Charles Swain Thomas, Harvard University.

Secretary-Treasurer: A. Bertram de Mille, Simmons  
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*(with the above)*

George F. Cherry, Loomis Institute, Windsor, Conn.

Edna O. Spinney, English High School, Lynn, Mass.

Anne Marjorie Day, Classical High School, Providence,  
R. I.

Martha C. Cramer, Nashua High School, Nashua, N. H.

George C. Franklin, Boston University, Boston, Mass.

Following the business of the day, Mr. E. E. Clive of the Copley Players gave an interesting talk on his work at the theatre.

*The Boston Conference.* At the Saturday morning session, we were all impressed by the definite and practical suggestions made by the speakers in their discussions of the subject, *Oral English*. There were emphasized the importance of oral English as expressed by the drama, the development of the voice, and methods for improving the oral English of high-school pupils.

The importance of oral English as expressed by the drama was emphasized by Professor Albert H. Gilmer, who spoke on *Educational Values of the Drama in England and*



*Russia.* In his account of the comparatively recent development of new interest in drama in those countries, he showed the value of this type of oral expression in guiding, influencing, and educating the popular mind.

The principles involved in voice training were briefly sketched by Mr. Kenny of the Emerson College of Oratory, who, after being introduced by the Dean of the college, Harry S. Ross, illustrated his explanation with the assistance of a group of students from the college. Although brief, his talk suggested what might be accomplished by an adequately trained, secondary-school teacher.

Methods for improving the oral English of high-school pupils were presented by William G. Hoffman, whose subject was *Speech Training in Secondary Schools*. After mentioning briefly the progressive yet interdependent relation of thought, language, and voice, he suggested a definite, classroom procedure for speech training in secondary schools: the study of significant news items furnish a valuable point of departure; criticisms of editorials, letters to editors, and the study of articles from the best magazines increase the pupil's ability to distinguish the elements of effectively organized composition; the reproduction of short narratives, like myths and Bible stories, develops a conscious evaluation of vocabulary; accurate observation with subsequent reports, debates, sales talks, interviews, round table discussions, further a pupil's ability to express his ideas orally; reading aloud from standard poetry strengthens a feeling for rhythm, trains the voice in expression, and creates additional appreciation of the power of vocabulary; conducting class meetings in simple parliamentary form, together with training in presenting motions and in acting as chairman of committees, gives a most practical kind of poise; knowledge of how to respond when called on for impromptu speaking, and the keeping of a journal in which pupils should record all topics which they consider worthy of discussion, were the suggestions with which Professor Hoffman concluded this program for definite, classroom procedure for speech training in secondary schools—a discussion decidedly valuable to a resourceful teacher.

*The Luncheon.* At the Annual Luncheon at the Hotel

Brunswick, Mr. Denis McCarthy charmed us with a few selections from his best-known poems. He was followed by Professor George Lyman Kittredge, who spoke delightfully of certain misconceptions of Shakespeare.

"It is a common impression," said Professor Kittredge, "to regard Hamlet as a person of weak will. This is true partly because his uncle is so robbed of his lines that he becomes almost negligible. We forget that this usurper was a most clever murderer, a man who had so covered his crime that no one, not even the queen, suspected him of the death of the former king.

"Another reason for this impression is our modern attitude toward the supernatural. We accept the ghost of this play as a part of stage technique. But the Elizabethans really believed in ghosts, and to them they had a different significance.

"To Hamlet the appearance of the ghost was scarcely enough proof upon which to act. He believed the ghost, but he wanted further proof, some evidence of this world, before committing himself to revenge.

"We blame our ancestors for acting upon unearthly evidence in the days of Salem Village; we blame Hamlet for not acting immediately upon similar evidence. We shall have to be consistent. Hamlet's scruples about the ghost were honest ones and not excuses. By the time he has the evidence he seeks, the play is far spent and many of us have cried, 'Weak willed!' The delay of Hamlet is praiseworthy and not blameworthy; it shows no defect in his character, but in the character of the evidence."

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#### BOOK NOTICES

*The Fine Art of Writing: For Those Who Teach It.* By H. Robinson Shipherd. Macmillan, 1926. \$1.80.

For the teacher of English composition, this will prove a valuable book in many ways. Following a discussion of *Axioms* and *Materials*, Professor Shipherd deals concretely and fully with practical *Methods* of instruction. Particularly noteworthy, also, is the section on *Precept and Practice*, where are quoted over a hundred passages that cleverly and trenchantly discuss the writing art, and how it is achieved.

*Teaching English in the Junior High School.* By Edward Harlan Webster and Dora V. Smith. World Book Company, 1927. \$2.00.

Dealing primarily with the teaching of English composition, this book is unquestionably a contribution of worth, particularly for those in the junior high school who are prepared to look upon this phase of their work as a teaching and not a testing process. Two types of project are discussed in detail—the intensive and the extensive—with emphasis in both thrown upon the social aspects of writing rather than upon the purely technical. A discussion of composition scales, with an annotated bibliography of scales and measures for English composition, is a notable feature of the book.

*The Golden Treasury.* By Francis T. Palgrave. Edited by Max J. Herzberg. (Riverside Literature Series). Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927. 80c.

The teacher of English who has learned through long experience to value at their true worth the books in the Riverside Literature Series will welcome this addition to the list. Professor Herzberg has succeeded admirably in his attempt to make the Golden Treasury practical for actual classroom work. In addition to Palgrave's original notes on the anthology—bibliographical, linguistic, and interpretative—there has been incorporated a generous body of study helps and suggestions, with examination questions in English from the College Entrance Board.

*The Carolinian.* By Rafael Sabatini. Edited by Barbara M. Hahn. (Riverside Literature Series). Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927. 92c.

The modern novel comes into its own with this school edition of *The Carolinian*. Because of the comparative ease with which its historical background in American Revolutionary days can be created, the book is well adapted for the novel course. Admirably edited—with notes and study helps, a list of scenes for dramatization, College Entrance Examination questions, and helpful suggestions for



both teacher and pupil—there is no reason why this novel should not take its place among American classics, of value from an historical and a literary point of view.

*Literature in the Junior High School (Book Two).* By Emma Miller Bolenius. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927. \$1.48.

For the second year of the junior high school, Miss Bolenius's new volume—Book Two of her interesting literature series—preserves the high standards set in the previous volume. The selections are thoroughly representative of both the contemporary and the classical, with distinction made—under each of seven topical divisions—between pleasure reading and study reading. With its careful selection of content, its schedule of readings, and its varied suggestions for individual differences and further reading, the book is a unit in itself, furnishing guidance for a full year's course.

## THE 1927 ISSUE

of our

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